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NICK LAND: "THE TELEOLOGICAL IDENTITY OF CAPITALISM AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE"

Remarks to the participants of the Incredible Machines 2014 Conference, March 8, 2014
Transcription by Jason Adams

Well, to be honest, I think the remarks I've got will probably seem to be crude and not very left-field – but, I'm punting from the sideline.

There's only really been one question, to be honest, that has guided everything I've been interested in for the last twenty years, which is: the teleological identity of capitalism and artificial intelligence. I've tried arguing about this in very different spaces, and with very different people, and it obviously produces a lot of stimulating friction, wherever you do it – but it's a sort of fundamental thesis that's becoming more and more persuasive to me.

The most interesting recent situation that came up, really, was discussing the whole pending A.I. phenomenon, which is a very specifically institutionalized project, by people who switched interestingly, from being engaged in actually, the production of the intelligence to people who started to assume that artificial intelligence was going to happen, and that the fundamental question was whether various structures of security can be put in place to protect people from what it is going to be like.

And, the way that this kind of development tracks the equivalent on the side of political economy is extremely striking to me – that, in both cases, one has an increasingly persuasive set of morals that are very, very stubbornly insistent – they come up generation after generation, in slightly different vocabularies, but extremely recognizable once you start looking for them.

[These are] based upon, and we can choose our vocabulary with great freedom, but I'll start with a very traditional one: spontaneous order, spontaneous organization, self-organization, emergence, auto-catalysis, catallaxy in economics. And everyone knows this stuff – it's occasionally critiqued precisely because of its continuity. We saw it in the early Nineties, where I first started really picking up on this type of thing – that there was an overt ideological thesis, that was at that time called the "Californian Ideology".

Now, I mean, I'm probably going back into people's influences at this point, so I apologize for that, but this was really provoked by certain things, and I would say a very key individual in this case was Kevin Kelly, who wrote a book that was, I think, quite influential, called "Out of Control". Well, he was joining very explicitly a set of analogies across a whole bunch of fields, and he was inspired by research conducted at the Santa Fe Institute, which is still doing very interesting work on complex systems today.

But it certainly included market economies, very explicitly on one end, and problems in fractical, computational research at the other end. Some other good examples would be things like Stuart Kauffman and his ability to generate almost totally randomized circuits, or distributed robotics stuff, which really comes from just bolting together very simple robot components and actually getting computative, emerging behavior out of that.

So, it's safe to say for at least two decades, and I think that's most certainly to underestimate it, there is a constant tendency for there to be a regeneration of a certain type of discourse that has powerful resonances both on the side of people who say, do technical research and intelligent machines, to summarize, and on the other side, people that have engaged very strongly with highly charged political discussion

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about the degree to which social processes are most effectively advanced by completely decontrolled social processes.

I mean, everyone recognizes that: that's exactly what the critique of the Californian Ideology was all about. First, at that point, it's the real boost phase of Silicon Valley as we now know it, associated with the whole resurgence of what I think, lots of people in this room are calling neoliberal idea to do with deregulation, privatization, abandoning or downsizing government. But everyone knows what that cocktail of ideas is about and I think everyone recognizes that those two discourses are extremely interconnected.

So I'm not going to go on about this much longer, I'm just going to say, I'm interested in whether people think that the two sides of this phenomenon really are usefully separated. I'm interested in whether people really think that there is an explicit historical and momentous convergence between these two, that is becoming starker and starker. And therefore, that really lays out the question about what kind of convergence point is actually being historically projected by this phenomenon. And then, I guess, I just think it's an opportunity to have a really heated, antagonistic discussion, but that's probably not the best thing right now, so thank you for that.

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